

1992

# Community, dominion, and membership

Lawrence C. Becker  
*Hollins University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.hollins.edu/philfac>



Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Becker, L. C. (1992), COMMUNITY, DOMINION, AND MEMBERSHIP. The Southern Journal of Philosophy, 30: 17–43. Hollins Digital Commons. Web.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Philosophy at Hollins Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Hollins Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [lvilelle@hollins.edu](mailto:lvilelle@hollins.edu), [millerjc@hollins.edu](mailto:millerjc@hollins.edu).

## COMMUNITY, DOMINION, AND MEMBERSHIP

Lawrence C. Becker  
*College of William and Mary*

The argument here is that individualist and communitarian theories are not as far apart as they often appear.\* On the fundamental question of whether to admit, as members of a group, people whose presence would damage it, communitarians have theoretical commitments (embedded in what I call the dominion argument) that are analogous to individualist commitments to impartial, egalitarian justice. Thus, even confining oneself strictly to "insider" arguments that exhibit a strong form of partiality for the group, the dominion argument is sometimes strong enough to require sacrificing the integrity of the group in order to assist outsiders to enter it.

### *Introduction*

Must a family break itself apart in order to care for foundlings abandoned on its doorstep? Must a club self-destruct in order to admit qualified but hostile applicants to membership? Must a nation abandon its traditions and standard of living in order to admit desperate immigrants? Such questions are relatively easy to answer if the group involved (family, neighborhood, organization, or nation) is clearly pathological or seriously unjust. Its destruction or fundamental reorganization might then be a good thing in itself, and be even better if it helps "outsiders." And in the contrary case, if the outsiders in question are making pathological or unjust claims against an admirable group, then the rejection of their claims may be unproblematic.

Further, if we consider these questions only in terms of an individualistic theory of justice (one that is suitably inclusive, impartial, and egalitarian), then even more cases appear to be

---

*Lawrence C. Becker is Professor of Philosophy and Kenan Professor of Humanities at the College of William and Mary. He is the editor, with Charlotte Becker, of the Encyclopedia of Ethics (1992), and the author of several books, including Property Rights (1977; 1980) and Reciprocity (1986; 1990).*

straightforward—even cases in which the social group is exemplary and the outsiders at the door are blameless.<sup>1</sup> Such a theory would have to hold, after all, that we must give equal consideration to the rights or consequences for *every* person touched by our actions, and judge the rightness of our conduct solely in terms of how well it satisfies all the interests, needs, rights, or claims of those individuals.<sup>2</sup> In this sort of account, no independent moral weight would be assigned to preserving existing social groups; their fate would be a derivative matter, to be decided by asking how everyone would fare—insiders and outsiders alike—under a given change in the rules. If on balance everyone's rights or interests would be better served by dropping national boundaries, or official languages, or state religions, political individualism would have to recommend it.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, widespread resistance (in theory as well as practice) to treating families, circles of friends, and larger communities as merely derivative and disposable arrangements for serving the interests of autonomous individuals. And theorists loosely identified as communitarians<sup>4</sup> have been persistently unsatisfied with individualist answers to the questions that opened this paper—even answers framed in terms of the many ways individualists evince concern about loyalty, tradition, social stability, moral character, and the elements of a good life. Communitarians apparently think that membership questions are more fundamental than individualists are ready to allow, even for less-than-admirable groups, and especially for exemplary ones forced to choose between self-preservation and harm to outsiders.

My own commitments are individualist ones, but like communitarians, I think these membership questions are often very difficult indeed—not only psychologically wrenching but theoretically challenging. And it seems to me that considering them in communitarian terms is illuminating for the whole range of issues that supposedly divide the two camps. I am not at all convinced that individualists and communitarians ultimately differ very much about anything. But if they do differ dramatically about anything, it is likely to show itself in this way: that in some important cases, where individualists cannot find grounds for allowing a community to preserve itself by remaining closed to outsiders, communitarians will be unable to find grounds for requiring that community to alter itself by extending membership to outsiders.

I want to explore that issue by finding an analog, in communitarian terms, to a fundamental line of individualist argument on membership questions. That is, I want to find

a communitarian version (call it the "insider's version") of the standard appeal to individualist justice as envisioned from the standpoint of an impartial, disinterested, "outside" observer. In brief, this outsider argument is that whenever the activities of one person or group unjustly affect the welfare of others, the injustice must be remedied. This is so even if the injustice is an unintended consequence of otherwise innocent activity, such as running a city club. If the injustice comes from excluding some people (say women) from membership in a given group, then extending membership to them is an obvious remedy. Whether it is also an appropriate remedy will depend on a number of factors: for example, whether the excluded people want to become members, whether opening the group to them would adequately redress past harms, whether it would be an even greater injustice to others, and whether there are alternative remedies. In principle, however, remedying this sort of injustice may require changing the nature of the group in ways that its current members do not want, and in ways that in fact damage or destroy the goods (as well as the injustice) produced by that group.

My candidate for a communitarian analog to that argument from impartial justice is what may be called the dominion argument. Roughly speaking, it is this (a more formal statement will be developed in a subsequent section): Communities necessarily have some degree of dominion over the lives of their members, in the sense that they to some extent determine the thought, affect, or action of their members. When such dominion imposes burdens on members, the aims characteristic of community life (the goods of community) require the community to generate some offsetting goods for its members—if not for the burdened members themselves, at least for things valued by them as members of the group. By extension, such offsetting benefits should be provided to everyone who is relevantly similar to burdened members. But non-members may be relevantly similar to members in this respect, and extending membership to them may be the only (or part of the only) adequate way of providing them with offsetting benefits. Thus, although many other factors are relevant to the decision, it may be that the group is required, by the aims characteristic of community life, to extend membership to dominated outsiders.

My claims will be that the dominion argument is genuinely communitarian, is sound, and is closely analogous to the individualist argument about impartial justice. If so, it is



some evidence toward the conclusion that there is not a gap between communitarian and individualist accounts of these membership questions.

In order to make good these claims, I will need to give a plausible account of the general nature of community and communitarian arguments, together with an account of the goods characteristic of community life. Once that has been done, the dominion argument can be stated more carefully and its soundness discussed.

### *Communities*

The label *community* is applied to many things, but for present purposes it seems wise to reserve it for an especially close-knit social group—one characterized by rather high levels of what I will call connectedness, closure, and mutuality. Suppose we say that social groups in general can be described in terms of the following sorts of elements:<sup>5</sup>

*Membership rules*, describing who can become a member of the group, and what level of participation in the group's activities is possible for each.

*Teleological factors*, describing the group's reason for being, and its ultimate or constitutive goals.

*Deontological rules*, describing conduct that is required and forbidden for members, including entitlements, priorities, and various sorts of boundaries.

*Valuational commitments*, describing the sorts of mediate aims, interests, acts, products, traits, achievements, and abilities that are valuable for the group, given its *telos*, and the weights assigned to them.

*Connectedness*, describing the extent to which, and ways in which, each member is related to all the others.

*Closure*, describing the extent to which members of the group are related only to other members of the group and not to individuals outside it.

*Mutuality levels*, describing the extent to which members of the group recognize themselves and each other as members of the group, make and recognize reciprocal contributions to each others' lives, have a common understanding of the nature of the group, and have univalent<sup>6</sup> responses to it and to each other.

In addition, though the rhetoric is overblown for small, informal groups, we may say for the sake of completeness that all social groups have the following features as well.

*Generative and transformative rules*, describing the group's explicit or implicit legislative processes.

*Administrative rules*, describing the group's executive and police powers, and adjudicative processes.

*Regulative policies, practices, and rules*, describing the group's *modus operandi* in implementing its rules.

*Legitimation assumptions*, describing the grounds for recognizing a given commitment, policy, practice, rule, or assumption as one of the group's own.

With this descriptive template in mind, and with a focus on groups characterized by high levels of connectedness, closure, and mutuality, we can say that to live in a community is to live in a group whose members recognize themselves and each other *as* members of that group; who have in common the purposes that define the group's teleological element, as well as the commitments that define its deontological and valuational elements; who share the group's legitimation assumptions; who have a general understanding of its other rules, policies, practices, and history; who have significantly stronger ties to each other than to non-members (a form of closure); and who have highly univalent responses in matters affecting the group and each member (a form of mutuality and connectedness). They may also be (or regard themselves as) deeply interdependent and reciprocal across the whole scope of their lives (more connectedness); and the group may be, or be regarded as, self-sufficient (more closure).

A good or exemplary community, then, is one that is good *as* a community (good of its kind), and at a minimum is free from standard defects recognized by both individualists and communitarians. To fix ideas, let us stipulate that an exemplary community is genuinely enabling and liberating for its members instead of oppressive; that it is just by its own standards, which its members accept; that it is responsive to special needs and changing circumstances; that it is benevolent both to members and outsiders; that its members recognize all of this and welcome participation in it; and that its members are able to see their univalent responses for what they are and regard them (in reflective moments) with the irony that befits a post-modern intellectual.

A word about univalence. This is the psychological core of communitarianism—both of the solidarity, empathy, and conviviality that communitarians extol and of the specter of mindless conformity that individualists decry. Univalence, as I will use the term, names only a limited equivalence relation. It describes the situation in which one person's response to another's experience has the same *valence* as the other's—that is, falls on the same side of indifference, along

roughly the same dimension. (If you are happy and my response is a univalent one, then I am certainly not unhappy, but may be anything from mildly pleased to ecstatic.) This is compatible with infinite variety—in degree of similarity, intensity, complexity, expression, self-awareness, and so on. The point is simply that in a genuine (ideal) community, when one member's experience is communicated to others, they empathize with it, and their resultant experience has the same valence as the original.

### *The Good of Community*

Consider next the ultimate aims of (exemplary) community life. Why would we want to create such social groups? What good would they be? Individualists and communitarians give strikingly different answers, and since I want to find a distinctly communitarian form of argument, it may be worthwhile to put those differences as starkly as possible.

Suppose that what you fear most about social life is the danger that it creates. People can be aggressive, cruel, envious, jealous, mean-spirited. They can lie, cheat, steal, rape, murder, and plunder. Some of them are smarter and stronger than you are. If resources are scarce, people who want what you have will come after it—will come after *you*. And you cannot stay awake and on guard forever. You need help; you need protective arrangements so you can go about your business in peace. You need a reliable, effective association of people who will help you defend your life, liberty, and property. That will take care of your biggest fear about living with other people.

Now what about your anxiety? Suppose your greatest source of anxiety about social life is the uncertainty it introduces into your plans and projects. Other people's activities—perfectly legitimate, non-threatening activities—constantly change the range of possibilities for doing what you want to do and the relative value of your holdings. So in addition to protection you will want some stability, continuity, and certainty—so that you can make plans and carry out projects and have some assurance that your achievements will have lasting, positive effects on the quality and quantity of your life. That will take care of your greatest anxiety about living with other people.

As for disappointment: Suppose your biggest disappointment in life is the knowledge that you cannot be self-sufficient—that you cannot get everything you want out of life on your own initiative with your own resources; that you owe a great deal of what you call your own to other people's

labor; and that you sometimes just flat crave the company of other people. If that is a disappointment to you then, you will want—in addition to protection and stability—the help, support, and company of other people in realizing your projects.

If you want all of that, then although you are definitely a schematic and idealized individualist, you are also enough of a human being to dream some utopian dreams about the ideal human community. Your account of that ideal—of the ultimate end of community life—will stress peace, safety, stability, cooperation, coordination, restraint, constraint, prevention, and liberty. It will find negative liberty exhilarating and positive liberty necessary. And the kind of community life that will be most attractive is one peopled with energetic, diverse, autonomous people of good will—people who are convivial and unobtrusive, self-reliant and reliable, willing to help but not preemptive about it. Your account of ideal community life will celebrate diversity, variety, and change within a stable, peaceful, and predictable framework; it will celebrate choice, personal autonomy, and liberty. It will treat mutuality as a means to all those things, and as a source of personal happiness. It will regard rational choice theory as the pinnacle of political philosophy; *n*-person prisoner's dilemmas as its deepest difficulties; and coordination problems as its most intriguing challenges.

An equally stark communitarian account would look very different, at least in terms of emphasis. Communitarian political theory does not usually proceed by imagining how an ideal community could quiet fears, relieve anxiety and offset disappointments. Community life is not proposed as a militant response to evil, or as a way of removing the obstacles other people introduce into our lives. In fact, in the starkest case, the community is not thought of as a *good* for people's lives, but rather as a *ground* or generative matrix for everything that could be such a good. Life in a human community is not imagined as an alternative that people in a state of nature might choose for good reasons, but is rather a necessary condition for the sort of human being who can make choices and have a life as distinct from a mere existence. That is the minimal teleological effect of community, then: to create and sustain a human life. Not one individual life, or a particular collection of individual lives, but a way of life—a life—as the term is used in the phrase 'the life of the mind.' And what guides the notion of an ideal community is, then, in part, a conception of what it means for people to live a genuinely human life—to participate in a genuinely human form of life.



That notion of genuineness poses problems, but the general outline of a communitarian account of it is familiar: Individuals are enmeshed in a thick web of inspiring social relationships, with high levels of mutuality; that web of mutuality encompasses all the members of the community, making it an organic whole, such that it is possible to assess its development with exacting criteria of unity, systemic integrity, fittingness, and completeness.

This is not to say, of course, that communitarians lack reasons for wanting to be in communities, or for wanting to create and improve them. Without one's natal community, one could not have such desires or reasons, but the life made possible by that community will also generate individuals who can reflect upon it and think of reasons and alternatives. They too, like the schematic individualists I have described, will be able to recite a litany of fears, anxieties and disappointments, hopes, expectations, and goals. Since we are trying for maximum contrast, for the moment, let us put the communitarian posture this way:

Suppose what we fear the most about social life is the loss of it; being abandoned; being excluded; being alone. Suppose our greatest anxiety is that somehow mutuality will fade, or fail us: that we will cause or be unable to assuage the suffering of others; that our own desires and projects and achievements may evoke disapproval or contempt in others; that we may inadvertently lose their esteem, and love. And suppose that our deepest disappointment in life is the discovery that what we do and say and think is a matter of complete indifference to most people—not that they are hostile or disapproving or even ignorant but that they simply do not care.

If all of that is true, then we are going to want a social structure in which solidarity is the first virtue of social institutions, and liberty, equality, and justice are its consequences. Mutuality will be desirable for its own sake, and not merely as a means to something else. Positive liberty will be exhilarating, and negative liberty a necessity. We will regard critical social theory as the pinnacle of political philosophy; the problem of legitimacy as its deepest difficulty.

This sharp contrast between individualist and communitarian positions on the good of community is striking, but it should be obvious that there is something badly wrong with it. Communitarians do not lack the fears, anxieties, disappointments, hopes, and dreams that individualists have about social life. They are as much aware of violence and injustice, as much aware of coordination and cooperation

problems, as much concerned about liberty and autonomy as individualists are. And the reverse is true also: individualists acknowledge that the self is a social artifact; they recognize the importance of conviviality, solidarity, and mutuality; they fear abandonment and isolation, are anxious about the opinions of others, are disappointed at the indifference of their fellows. The difference between individualists and communitarians on this question is not over the inventory of goods. And the difference is probably not even about the relative importance of the goods themselves, when they are considered in pairwise comparisons. The difference is rather one of expository priority and emphasis, and that difference in emphasis is, I think, a consequence of other, more fundamental, methodological, and metaphysical disagreements.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, I will treat the inventory and pairwise priorities of the goods of (ideal) community life as common ground for individualists and communitarians. And when I refer generally to the good or goods of community I will be referring to the whole inventory sketched in this section, stripped of contested priorities and emphases.

### *The Burdens of Community*

Much the same result follows from a consideration of the costs, harms, inconveniences, and burdens of social life. As far as I can tell, individualists and communitarians agree on this inventory also, and perhaps even on pairwise rankings within it. The differences here are again ones of expository priority and emphasis, generated by more fundamental disagreements. The common ground, as I see it, is roughly this.

*Restrictions.* Groups typically impose special duties of care, restraint, contribution, or participation upon members. These deontological rules are in principle direct restrictions on members, and the gravitational pull of the other defining features of the group (valuational commitments, legitimation assumptions, and so forth) amplified by mutuality, closure, and connectedness, amount to indirect restrictions. Of course these restrictions may not be felt as such by members—either because they are welcomed or because they are like the proverbial locked door that no one knows is locked. And they may not actually restrict conduct if they are superfluous—if they merely prohibit things members never do anyway. But to the extent that they are actual restrictions, felt as such by members who would choose to do otherwise and would profit from doing so, they are burdens.

*Intrusions.* As noted earlier, in a genuine community as opposed to a mere aggregation or organization, people are bound together by mutuality—a wide array of reciprocal practices and dispositions, as well as affective ties. To some extent, they have univalent emotional responses. This means that each member will respond, both in terms of action and affect, to the conduct and experience of others. Let us call this sort of response *mirroring*, to indicate that it is a reflection in one person's life of another person's conduct or experience—a reflection elicited by that other person. As the level of connectedness in a community increases, so too will the frequency and potency of mirroring responses. This sort of mutuality is intrusive, and sometimes very burdensome. (If my emotional landscape is going to mirror yours, and if I have to finish a paper by the end of the week, I can be pardoned for hoping that you will spend most of that time at peace with yourself and the world.) High levels of mutuality and connectedness make social life rich, productive, surprising, and exhilarating—when one is in the company of talented, fortunate, cheerful people of good will who respect a closed office door. Those same high levels can be oppressive in the company of helpless, luckless, embittered people who make incessant demands.

*Foreclosures.* To the extent that a group is closed, it *forecloses* opportunities for its members—eliminates possibilities for wider social relationships. And in general, because providing people with a specific benefit often necessitates foreclosing alternatives of equal or greater value, the goods produced by a community will often preclude the production of alternatives desired by members. Such foreclosures are opportunity costs. Further, to the extent that members of a group are successfully socialized into either ignoring or discounting certain possibilities, or into finding them either irresistible or untenable, then again opportunities have been foreclosed. (There is a connection, here, between restrictions and foreclosures. Groups often try to make restrictions costless by socializing members into welcoming or ignoring them. But to do that is to introduce a foreclosure into the equation, and may result simply in the substitution of one sort of cost for another.)

Now it is my assumption that this discussion of the burdens of community is also common ground for communitarians and individualists, even though there may be sharp disagreement about how pervasive and oppressive those burdens are in an ideal community. Moreover, I assume that communitarians want to minimize the burdens of community life whenever

that is consistent with promoting the goods of community. They will want to do this either directly, through an absolute reduction of the burdens, or indirectly, through providing offsetting benefits to members. And I will assume that communitarian political theory would in general regard the reduction of unnecessary burdens as a matter of justice. That is, I assume that the amelioration of unnecessarily oppressive social arrangements is regarded as a moral requirement by communitarians, as it is by individualists as well.

### *Communitarian Arguments*

Communitarians argue for the distinct ontological and moral importance of social groups. They emphasize the ways in which an "individual" is as theoretical an entity as a "group," the ways in which individuals are produced and sustained by their particular social environments, and the ways in which radical change to those environments produces radical change in the individuals themselves. In the parlance of traditional metaphysics, communitarians argue that the relations between individual and group are often internal ones.<sup>8</sup>

These arguments on behalf of social groups, however, have a startling consequence for membership questions: Insofar as my relations to any group are internal ones, my identity as an individual is inseparable from the identity of that group. It follows that destroying the group amounts to destroying my own identity as an individual, and preserving the group amounts to preserving my identity. If this is so—particularly if destroying one's group is an act of *self*-destruction—then the membership question is a gripping one. It is very like the question of suicide. Thus I assume that:

- 1) Anything that purports to be a communitarian argument about membership but which does not connect it in this way to identity is suspect.

Moreover, in order to invite the widest plausible separation between individualist and communitarian arguments, I will make the following additional assumptions about what counts as a communitarian argument:

- 2) It will give (or be consistent with giving) independent moral weight to the community itself, as against the sum of individual interests in it.

(If we do not make some such assumption, communitarian theory is merely a disguised form of individualism, running a local aggregate welfare operation.)

- 3) It will give (or be consistent with giving) extra moral weight or priority to some *one* community, as against other groups or individuals.



(If we do not make this assumption, communitarian theory is merely a puffed-up form of liberal individualism, with communities playing the part of individuals.)

- 4) It will give (or be consistent with giving) extra moral weight or priority to the interests of *members* of some one community, as against individuals outside the group.

(This assumption is meant to be stated as weakly as it can be to preserve the kind of closure, mutuality, and connectedness definitive of genuine communities.)

Further, to make the strongest argument against the hardest case, I assume we should:

- 5) ensure that the argument will apply to exemplary communities as defined above, as well as to less-than-ideal communities and groups;
- 6) proceed as far as possible on ground common to individualists and communitarians;
- 7) consider only conflicts between insiders and genuine outsiders (not between different categories of insiders);
- 8) avoid arguments that depend on showing that the insiders and outsiders are in fact mutually interdependent and fully reciprocal.

A word about the final two conditions, both imposed to make sure we are dealing with the hardest cases, especially for communitarians.

Gerald Postema has argued convincingly<sup>10</sup> that many efforts that seem to be attempts to extend membership to outsiders are actually attempts to move current members *from* one sort of membership status to another. That may be the most accurate way of describing the current situation of blacks in South Africa, for example, and such cases are familiar targets for standard egalitarian and impartialist arguments. So I want to deal with cases of genuine outsiders, not simply less-than-full members.

And for similar reasons I want to avoid another response to the problem, also mentioned by Postema,<sup>11</sup> which tries to build a case for duties of reciprocity to outsiders, based on a recognition of mutuality akin to what we have with insiders. It is of course true, and a very important and powerful truth, that if we can show insiders that their exclusionary policies are based on false beliefs about the range of people who actually participate in and make essential contributions to the group's enterprise, then we have the beginnings of an argument from fair play or reciprocity for extending membership. And such arguments *are* often both correct and conveniently ignored by people who want to keep their borders closed. Good as these arguments are, however, I think they

leave out a set of considerations we may need in the hardest cases. After all, insider arguments by their very nature depend on the recognition of the distinctiveness and unitary character of a given community, and so must recognize the possibility of the genuine outsider—one not (yet) linked to the community by a shared history, purpose, or other elements of genuine mutuality. And insiders must recognize the possibility that extending membership to such outsiders may change the community so radically as to destroy it.

### *Dominion and Membership*

What genuinely communitarian (insider) argument could there be that would ever require an exemplary community to extend membership to outsiders, when doing so would alter the community in a fundamental way, against the wishes of its current members? I propose the following candidate for such an argument. It is based on the concept of domination (dominion).

I will say that a social group dominates or has dominion over people if it effectively defines the range of thought, affect, or action open to them, and thus the goods available and burdens unavoidable in their lives. The people involved on either side of the relationship can be aware of the domination or not, and be either benefitted or harmed by it. Domination can be intentional or not, malicious or not, coercive or not, oppressive or not, pervasive or local, continuous or episodic. It can operate in a wide variety of ways—ranging from forcible interventions in specific acts, to the manipulation of incentives and opportunity costs, to the largely uncontrollable determination of generally available forms of consciousness (in a Marxian sense of the term).

I take it that some such broad conception of domination is standardly employed in communitarian critiques of individualism—at least in those critiques directed at undermining the notion of the autonomous individual. The idea is that all individuals, as social beings, are necessarily (and pervasively) dominated by the social groups within which their individual identities are determined. If that is so, the choice is not between being dominated and being autonomous; it is rather between various sorts of domination. And I take it that individualists must reject or at least minimize the importance of this notion of domination. Dominion thus seems a promising candidate for a genuinely communitarian argument. As follows:

- 1) The dominion any group has over the lives of its members imposes burdens as well as benefits upon those who are dominated.
- 2) When such burdens are otherwise irreducible, common-ground assumptions about the goods of community generate an institutional obligation on the group to provide offsetting benefits for its members.
- 3) By extension, anyone who is relevantly similar to a dominated and burdened member, in the sense of also being burdened by the group's domination, should be provided with offsetting benefits.
- 4) Membership in the group is not a necessary condition for being relevantly similar to a dominated and burdened member. That is, outsiders may be relevantly similar.
- 5) For at least some outsiders, the group's domination may be such that only membership in the group itself (with the entitlements following from membership) is a sufficient offsetting benefit.
- 6) Thus (other things equal), the group ought either to eliminate the domination of the burdened outsiders or to admit them to membership.
- 7) Suppose eliminating the domination would require fundamental changes in the nature of the group—in its valuational and deontological commitments, processes and procedures, connectedness and mutuality levels. That is, suppose that eliminating the domination would effectively destroy the way of life defined by the existing group and replace it with another. (Think of eliminating the shadow Harvard casts on American higher education.)
- 8) Suppose further that admitting dominated and burdened outsiders to membership would also be self-destructive for the group—would also effectively change its nature and the way of life it defines for its members.
- 9) Then assuming a general teleological commitment on the part of the group to preserve itself, it should opt for the alternative that is least self-destructive.
- 10) Thus, if eliminating the domination of outsiders is more self-destructive than admitting them to membership, then the group ought to admit them to membership.

That is the dominion argument, and it seems to me to be sound. But I certainly do not claim that it is decisive. There are dozens of other considerations that would have to be brought to bear to assess a concrete political situation, even solely from the perspective of communitarian political theory. One that suggests itself immediately is whether the community is using its dominion imperialistically or not. It would

be an odd result if a state could cynically extend the shadow of its dominion in order to ground a dominion argument for annexing a population of new members—whether that population wanted to be annexed or not. Perhaps, if the outsiders do not want to become members (or if their desire to enroll is itself a product of the community's dominion over them), the only remedy will be the elimination of the dominion.

### *A Representative Case*

Consider, though, how the dominion argument might arise in a representative case. In my view the range of such cases is very wide—so wide, in fact, that I do not want to sidetrack the theoretical discussion into disputes about the historical accuracy of my peculiar reading of real-world examples. But a representative and near-enough-to-real hypothetical case may help to fix ideas.

Suppose there is a monastic community whose life of religious devotion, prayer, and contemplation requires solitude. Travel beyond the walls is forbidden to monks, except when they are required to work in the fields owned by the order. Inside the walls, there is a rule of silence for all activities except religious ceremonies, most of which are open to the believers who live and work nearby. Those services are offered by the monks in fulfillment of an obligation to propagate their faith.

The monks' faith—call it the conformist religion—is shared by nearly everyone on a large continent, and is the established religion in all of the states on that continent. This religion has succeeded, over a period of centuries, in making dramatic changes in social norms—norms derived (sometimes rather tortuously) from its most fundamental theological commitments. In particular, it has moderated the brutality of non-religious warfare, eliminated slavery and the chattel status of women and children, eliminated polygamy, and inculcated very strong and widely shared social norms governing monogamous marriage and nuclear families. These norms promote the equal moral worth of all members of the faith regardless of station; prohibit infanticide, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide; prohibit adultery and incest.

Conformists have been somewhat less successful at eliminating pre-marital and extramarital sex, and in limiting sex within marriage to procreative purposes—having succeeded merely in silencing public discussion of such matters and in eliminating the availability of contraceptives. There are thus many unplanned pregnancies. There is also wide-



spread poverty, in part because families are typically too large, and in part because the religious establishment owns so much tax-exempt land that taxes on other lands are very high. This is even worse for the small enclaves of non-conformists who live on the continent.

Against conformist doctrine, and despite the best efforts of the religious establishment, members of non-conformist groups are legally segregated from the larger society. They are taxed but not allowed to own real property; they are excluded from schools and from most occupations; they are not permitted to marry conformists, or to have their children adopted by conformists. Though they are officially tolerated, they are regularly persecuted. Yet most of them lack prospects for a better life elsewhere, and nearly all of them accept as their own (as derivative of their own traditions) the conformist social norms about marriage, family, and sex mentioned above.

Many families, both conformist and non-conformist, give up children for adoption, purely for reasons of the children's welfare. The religious establishment brokers such adoptions for its members, and runs orphanages, but its services in those respects fall far short of meeting the need. Moreover, by law, such services are only available to the faithful. Members of minority religions and atheists may not apply.

The monks, we may suppose, have withdrawn to a hermetic existence in part to disassociate themselves from various kinds of corruption in the society as a whole (including its treatment of non-conformists), and to pursue a vision of what they consider to be a pure form of the faith. They are convinced that the power and constancy of their prayers, made possible by the nature of their monastic life, is as effective as political action would be in changing the secular world. Moreover, they believe their way of life is uniquely holy, and that the existence of monasteries such as theirs is important to the faith as a whole. They find their lives fulfilling, and richly rewarding.

Now suppose that desperate non-conformist families, overburdened with children they cannot feed, begin to abandon infants at the monastery, under circumstances that permit everyone to maintain the polite fiction that these are conformist children. And suppose the monks soon run out of places to take the infants. Thus the choice they face is whether to take the infants into their community and raise them as conformists, or to quietly return the infants to the non-conformist community. Taking them in means turning the monastery into an orphanage; it means radically altering

the monastic community. And it is by no means clear that this would be a good thing for the infants. (Would the monks make good foster parents? Would the grown children, raised as conformists, learn of their origins and repudiate the choices made for them? Would it be any better if the monks covertly raised the children as non-conformists?)

How might the dominion argument apply to this case? Assume that in considering the infants on their doorstep, the monks refuse to use (or refuse to give decisive weight to) impartialist principles of justice that cover conformists and non-conformists alike. That is, assume that the monks begin and end with considerations about the integrity and welfare of their own community and what their own membership in it requires. Assume further that these monks are sensitive to the danger of relying on purely accidental features of their own community in making this decision. They are theoreticians; they want to know if there are any *general* communitarian or "insider" arguments (independent of the purely local features of a given community) that can require them to give up their way of life. Assume finally that the monks accept the soundness of the dominion argument outlined above. How can it be applied to their case?

It is easy to see what the questions would be. Is it the monastic community that dominates the non-conformists? After all, the monks have withdrawn from "the world" in part to avoid contributing to its injustices. Yet they obey the laws, support fully the doctrines of the conformist faith, and comply with many social conventions that dominate non-conformists. They are thus to some degree implicated in any indictment that can be brought against the larger religious and political communities. But is their complicity enough to warrant the claim that the monastery imposes burdens on non-conformist families? And if so, are they the sort of burdens that require the monks to provide an offsetting benefit? What sort of offsetting benefit, consistent with the nature of monastic life, is available? (Wouldn't the monks be likely to believe that prayer could in principle be a benefit?)

Those are all difficult questions, and it is tempting to think that the monks would inevitably answer them conservatively—finding reasons for denying that they needed to compromise their community in order to provide relief to outsiders. But notice that the difficulties here are parallel to those raised by "outsider" arguments about impartial justice: Who is responsible for the injustice? What sort of remedy is appropriate? And we know that individualists are likely to put a



conservative spin on the answers to those questions too—e.g., in immigration law and foreign aid policy.

Neither the dominion argument nor the impartial justice argument is a decision procedure. Each is difficult to apply. Each can often be evaded. The point, however, is that they are remarkably parallel, and suggest that in precisely the cases (the membership cases) where individualist and communitarian arguments should differ the most, they may not differ very much at all.

Consider the range of cases represented by the monastery example. The structure of the monastery case—that is, the parts of its structure that are representative of the range of cases to which the dominion argument is relevant—may be put this way. (a) The monastery case concerns a tightly knit, exemplary community that dominates outsiders in the sense that it arguably generates or reinforces features of the social world that control their lives. (b) The case concerns a form of dominion that arguably imposes both significant burdens and benefits on all who are dominated, but (c) especially burdens a group of “genuine” outsiders—that is, people who share, at most, only some of the derivative rather than the constitutive features of the community. (d) It is clear that bringing the outsiders into membership in the community would change the community in a fundamental way—a way that the current members of the community do not want. (e) The case at least suggests that altering the community, by making the outsiders (infants, here) members of it, might relieve them of their special burden.

Many types of cases exhibit some or all of these five features. Change the monastery to a family—one that imposes on a daughter the belief not only that abortion is impermissible but that if she gets pregnant out of wedlock the family will take the father and the baby in, whatever the cost, even though the family is financially and emotionally stretched to its limit. Imagine that the daughter gets pregnant; her lover is not ready to marry; her family is not financially or emotionally prepared to take in a new baby and son-in-law; she doesn't want an abortion; she doesn't want to keep the baby; she doesn't want to marry her lover under these conditions. She wants instead to have the baby and put it up for adoption. The family dominates the daughter, and (as far as she can think) makes not only abortion but (openly) having the child or putting it up for adoption out of the question. Suppose she hides her pregnancy and covertly tries to arrange an adoption.<sup>12</sup> Suppose her family discovers this. Surely this case has the requisite

structure. The dominion argument pointedly applies—pointedly raises the issue of how the family should deal with the burdens its dominion has (arguably) imposed.

Or change the outsiders from infants to immigrants, and the community from a family or monastery to a nation. Suppose the nation has taken over a colonial territory and joined a civil war. Suppose another nation has joined the other warring faction. And suppose, twenty years and several million casualties, later the refugees left by the abrupt withdrawal of one nation, finding their lives intolerable, set sail for a neighboring island allied with their former colonial masters . . .

Or change the outsiders from immigrants to citizens of a stable, productive nation whose lives are cluttered and whose air is fouled by the spillover from an overwhelmingly energetic country on their border. And suppose these dominated people have no desire whatsoever to join their neighbors' community . . .

In all these cases and many more (e.g., the admission policies of private clubs, the use of guest workers . . .) the same structural features (may) occur: a tightly knit community dominates a group of genuine outsiders, imposes a net burden on them, and is forced to consider the question of whether it is morally required to alter its way of life in order to deal with the consequences of its dominion. Cases with these structural features are prime candidates for both the (communitarian) dominion argument and the (individualist) argument from impartial justice. The parallel structure of the arguments, of the membership cases to which they apply, and of the sorts of debates that surround their application to those cases, suggests to me that (on this score at least) there is not much practical difference between communitarian and individualist approaches to the membership question.

I can imagine (indeed I have heard) an outcry of objections to this argument, hedged or not as it may be by other considerations. Replies to three central ones, however, will have to suffice for the time being.

### *Not Communitarian Enough*

*Objection:* We were promised a communitarian argument; an insider's argument. One that stood on common ground, to be sure, but one that did not depend on individualist or impartialist principles. Yet there is nothing especially insiderish about this so-called dominion argument; it fits comfortably into universalist and impartialist lines of thought. And at a



that just typical of communitarians? Isn't that a natural consequence of the sort of connectedness, closure, and mutuality that defines community life? And isn't it most typical and most natural in ideal communities?

*Reply:* Psychologically, perhaps. Morally, no. Just as we distinguish psychological from ethical egoism, I assume we have to distinguish psychological truths about living in a community from what is morally defensible about such a life. And this proposal about giving our own people more weight than others sounds innocent here only to the extent that we lose track of the quantifier. Recall that the idea was that "For any given situation" we must give more weight to ourselves than to others. And that is no more plausible than the parallel form of individualism, namely ethical egoism. Just as self-critical individualists quickly find ethical egoism indefensible, so communitarians will (I assume) quickly find its parallel in their universe to be indefensible.

The question is really just this: Is there any defensible form of communitarian political theory that excludes outsiders altogether from being considered relevantly similar to insiders? If that question must be answered with a "no" as I think it must, then the dominion argument will go through.

*Objection:* How can we be sure that that question must be answered in the negative? No doubt it is true that many modern accounts amount to a sort of liberal communitarianism, in which outsiders are regarded as the moral equals of members and in which no one community is superior to all others. But do these accounts exhaust communitarian political theory? Couldn't a theocratic version, for example, declare all outsiders to be infidels and outlaws, and declare the existing nature of the community to be sacred and inviolable?

*Reply:* Such declarations are of course possible, in the sense that they are intelligible. And they need not be theological. One can take a Stone Age view of the tribe and define the class of human beings as co-extensive with the membership of the tribe. I can't think how such views could be defended philosophically. But I will concede that my argument only applies to philosophically defensible positions. For those positions the argument will go through.

*Objection:* That is grossly unfair. Sacred communities are paradigmatic examples of the sort of exclusivity that we are considering. They cannot simply be waved aside with a snide elision into talk about the Stone Age. A closed community of faith—whether a cloistered order like the Trappists, a religious community such as the ultra-orthodox Jews in

Jerusalem, or a secular utopian community—confronts these membership problems. And it is not easy to see how we can decide that some of them must open themselves to destruction while others can retain their historic identities.

*Reply:* My contention here is that the dominion argument helps us see the answer to that question—precisely in the case of exemplary communities. The issue here is whether any closed group we can recognize as exemplary would also, on its own principles, assert that outsiders were never sufficiently similar to insiders to allow the dominion argument to go through. No doubt such a claim is intellectually intelligible. I just can't think of a case (including the ones you mention) where it is actually made by members of the group in a philosophically defensible way.

Perhaps the point will be clearer in terms of the impartial justice argument. Take one of the cases mentioned—the ultra-orthodox Jews of Jerusalem. Do they recognize outsiders (other Jews, Christians, Palestinians) as being within the scope of principles of justice? Of course. Does that mean that they recognize outsiders as relevantly similar to themselves when it comes to applying the principles of justice? Of course. Do they believe that their community is seriously unjust to outsiders, especially in Jerusalem, and that the principles of justice require them to alter their community to rectify that injustice? Evidently not. But do they admit that, in principle, the question of justice can be raised? They cannot consistently deny it. And if the justice argument is in principle applicable on this point, so is the parallel dominion argument. It does go through.

*Objection:* It will go through step 4. But there is still the question of the moral weight to be given to the group itself, as distinct from its members. The dominion argument contemplates something analogous to suicide. It says that the claims of outsiders may be so great that the group will have to self-destruct. Do individualists ever require such a thing of individuals? If not—that is, if individualism grants enough moral weight to the individual to defeat a moral requirement of suicide—why can't insiders grant their privileged community enough moral weight to defeat claims that it must destroy itself in aid of others?

*Reply:* They probably can grant this, with respect to direct and complete self-annihilation. What they cannot grant is complete immunity from self-sacrifice and fundamental change, any more than individualism can grant a similar thing to individuals. That is why the argument is cast in terms of degrees of fundamental change. We grant a general

that just typical of communarians? Isn't that a natural consequence of the sort of connectedness, closure, and mutuality that defines community life? And isn't it most typical and most natural in ideal communities?

*Reply:* Psychologically, perhaps. Morally, no. Just as we distinguish psychological from ethical egoism, I assume we have to distinguish psychological truths about living in a community from what is morally defensible about such a life. And this proposal about giving our own people more weight than others sounds innocent here only to the extent that we lose track of the quantifier. Recall that the idea was that "For any given situation" we must give more weight to ourselves than to others. And that is no more plausible than the parallel form of individualism, namely ethical egoism. Just as self-critical individualists quickly find ethical egoism indefensible, so communarians will (I assume) quickly find its parallel in their universe to be indefensible.

The question is really just this: Is there any defensible form of communitarian political theory that excludes outsiders altogether from being considered relevantly similar to insiders? If that question must be answered with a "no" as I think it must, then the dominion argument will go through.

*Objection:* How can we be sure that that question must be answered in the negative? No doubt it is true that many modern accounts amount to a sort of liberal communitarianism, in which outsiders are regarded as the moral equals of members and in which no one community is superior to all others. But do these accounts exhaust communitarian political theory? Couldn't a theocratic version, for example, declare all outsiders to be infidels and outlaws, and declare the existing nature of the community to be sacred and inviolable?

*Reply:* Such declarations are of course possible, in the sense that they are intelligible. And they need not be theological. One can take a Stone Age view of the tribe and define the class of human beings as co-extensive with the membership of the tribe. I can't think how such views could be defended philosophically. But I will concede that my argument only applies to philosophically defensible positions. For those positions the argument will go through.

*Objection:* That is grossly unfair. Sacred communities are paradigmatic examples of the sort of exclusivity that we are considering. They cannot simply be waved aside with a snide elision into talk about the Stone Age. A closed community of faith—whether a cloistered order like the Trappists, a religious community such as the ultra-orthodox Jews in

Jerusalem, or a secular utopian community—confronts these membership problems. And it is not easy to see how we can decide that some of them must open themselves to destruction while others can retain their historic identities.

*Reply:* My contention here is that the dominion argument helps us see the answer to that question—precisely in the case of exemplary communities. The issue here is whether any closed group we can recognize as exemplary would also, on its own principles, assert that outsiders were never sufficiently similar to insiders to allow the dominion argument to go through. No doubt such a claim is intellectually intelligible. I just can't think of a case (including the ones you mention) where it is actually made by members of the group in a philosophically defensible way.

Perhaps the point will be clearer in terms of the impartial justice argument. Take one of the cases mentioned—the ultra-orthodox Jews of Jerusalem. Do they recognize outsiders (other Jews, Christians, Palestinians) as being within the scope of principles of justice? Of course. Does that mean that they recognize outsiders as relevantly similar to themselves when it comes to applying the principles of justice? Of course. Do they believe that their community is seriously unjust to outsiders, especially in Jerusalem, and that the principles of justice require them to alter their community to rectify that injustice? Evidently not. But do they admit that, in principle, the question of justice can be raised? They cannot consistently deny it. And if the justice argument is in principle applicable on this point, so is the parallel dominion argument. It does go through.

*Objection:* It will go through step 4. But there is still the question of the moral weight to be given to the group itself, as distinct from its members. The dominion argument contemplates something analogous to suicide. It says that the claims of outsiders may be so great that the group will have to self-destruct. Do individualists ever require such a thing of individuals? If not—that is, if individualism grants enough moral weight to the individual to defeat a moral requirement of suicide—why can't insiders grant their privileged community enough moral weight to defeat claims that it must destroy itself in aid of others?

*Reply:* They probably can grant this, with respect to direct and complete self-annihilation. What they cannot grant is complete immunity from self-sacrifice and fundamental change, any more than individualism can grant a similar thing to individuals. That is why the argument is cast in terms of degrees of fundamental change. We grant a general



teleological commitment to self-preservation, strong enough, perhaps, to block required suicide. But if we find that the group ought *either* to eliminate its dominion *or* to admit dominated outsiders to membership, and if either course of action is to some degree self-destructive, then it must choose the least self-destructive of the two. In principle, that could be the one that admits outsiders to membership. And that is enough to allow the argument to go through.

### *Not a Matter of Degree*

*Objection:* Changes in identity are not matters of degree. A community that undergoes essential change is a different group than it was, period. Suicide might be a slow process, but successful results are not a matter of degree. So if a community must preserve itself in order to carry out its own teleological commitments, it cannot contemplate any genuinely self-destructive act. It cannot accept the choice between types of self-destruction offered by the dominion argument. It cannot recognize, as a moral requirement, the demand that it destroy itself, and therefore it must simply choose its own survival, with regret for the burdens its dominion imposes.

*Reply:* Leaving aside the rigors of the identity relation and the metaphysical difficulties of preserving identity through change, we may reply this way. The sort of changes we are concerned with here are fundamental ones—ones which members of a group would consider to be changes in the very nature of the community itself; changes that would remake the community into something essentially different than it is. Not all fundamental change of this sort is complete metamorphosis, however. It can be that radical, but it can also leave many aspects of the social structure intact. Thus members of a community can in principle face choices between more and less radical change, even where both options are fundamental or essential transformations. And that is enough to allow the dominion argument to go through.

### *Not Determinate Enough*

*Objection:* Suppose it does go through. So what? It isn't determinate enough to matter. It tells us that we cannot give infinite weight to our own community; it tells us that *in principle* we cannot *always* give it *enough* weight to protect it against the claims of outsiders. But that is pathetically vague. Allusions to immigration problems, guest-worker arrangements, economic imperialism, and so forth suggested

themselves at the outset. But the analysis here is far too vague to have a determinate bearing on those real-world questions. We began with a startling question and a seemingly strong claim. We have ended with an argument that supports only finger-wagging. "Consider dominion," we say now. "It just might be relevant, under some conditions which unfortunately we cannot specify. Under those conditions (whatever they might be) you just might have to compromise the integrity of your community. Of course, then again, you might not have to. It all depends."

*Reply:* The dominion argument is a schematic one. Standing alone, it gives little guidance. But it does not stand alone in this article; it is embedded here in a discussion that indicates a number of things about its application to concrete cases.

For example, the notions of connectedness, closure, and mutuality provide a useful way of assessing the solidarity and integrity of a community, and the extent to which extending membership would change its character. This is meant to suggest a line of inquiry into the notion of an ideal community that can be used with the dominion argument. Think, for instance, of the ways in which a family incorporates—or fails to incorporate—people who marry into it. If a given nuclear family is so solid that it will literally disintegrate if a child marries, we have grounds for saying it is pathological. And then when the dominion argument forces a choice in such a case, the choice is between ending the dominion in a way that preserves a pathological group and ending the dominion by eliminating the pathological group. That still is not conclusive, but it helps. And there is similar help to be had by considering the extent and nature of the dominion, the replaceability of the group in the lives of its members, the preferences of those who are dominated, and so on.

Perhaps a better example will help. Consider the sudden increase, in 1991, of "irregular" immigrants from Cuba into south Florida. The numbers involved (over 1,000 in one three-month period), the desperate circumstances in which they arrived, and the memory of the 100,000 who came in the Mariel "boatlift," raised alarm. The concerns expressed by public officials during this period were typically framed in terms of individualist principles of justice: the acknowledgement that these desperate people deserve humane treatment, and that we ought to be benevolent toward them, as to all deserving and needy people; a denial that the citizens of south Florida are responsible for the injustice that brings these immigrants to our shores, and thus a denial that Floridians are required as a matter of justice to take in all

such immigrants; and the argument that if we were to accept these immigrants as a matter of justice, we would then be required to take in all relevantly similar ones—e.g., from Haiti, El Salvador, and other places in the Caribbean and Latin America.

The dominion argument, applied to this case, would first address the nature of the alarm. Is the issue merely money for the emergency phase, or does it go to the question of making fundamental changes in the nature of the communities in south Florida? If the latter, is it the case that Floridian communities (or the wider ones of which they are a part) have so burdened the lives of these immigrants that offsetting benefits should now be provided to them? One can imagine that the arguments here will concern several things: the effects of decades of effort to undermine Fidel Castro's regime; consequent hardships for ordinary Cubans; persistent efforts to advertise to Cubans the liberty and wealth available in the U.S. Once those matters are laid out in detail, and similarly detailed studies are made of our behavior to other people in the region, it will be possible to see whether consistency will in fact require taking other groups of immigrants. The dominion argument may yield significantly different conclusions for immigrants from different countries. Domination is a matter of degree; so is the fundamental change wrought by various groups of immigrants, both in terms of numbers and composition.

The fact that the contribution of the dominion argument will not be clear until it is worked out in detail in each case does not suggest that the argument-schema presented here is useless. After all, the contribution of "outsider" arguments about impartial justice, at least as they are typically used in these cases, will not be clear either until the cases are worked out in detail.<sup>14</sup> Have we been unjust to the Cubans? The Haitians? Have we contributed indirectly and unintentionally, but culpably, to the injustice of the regimes the immigrants are fleeing from? In what ways? To what extent? Would offering them membership in our society redress the injustice? Until these questions are answered, the impartial justice argument is also merely schematic. Surely that does not damage its importance.

In short, the dominion argument here, if it is sound, is applicable to concrete cases as part of a comprehensive inquiry into the questions with which this paper began. To ask more of it—to ask, for example, that it provide by itself a determinate solution to particular practical problems, is to give in to Procrustean impulses.



## NOTES

\* This paper owes its inspiration to the opportunity to comment on a paper by Gerald Postema (cited below) given at the Virginia Tech Conference on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, in April of 1989. The organizers of the conference, William H. Williams and Harlan Miller, encouraged me to expand the dominion argument into a paper. A version of the paper was improved by comments from an audience at the University of Virginia, and the Social and Political Philosophy Group at the College of William and Mary. The latter group, and colleagues at *Ethics*, encouraged me to include more examples. My colleague George Harris was instrumental in helping me see places where I had needlessly confused readers by introducing the language of justice.

<sup>1</sup> That is, they are straightforward at a theoretical level restricted to considering principles of justice isolated from broader concerns about moral character and the good life. And of course for anyone who has deep attachments to a group involved in such issues, they will never be straightforward at a psychological or practical level.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to readers of an earlier draft for encouraging me to clarify the point that both deontological and consequentialist theories are implicated here.

<sup>3</sup> See Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), chapters 7-13, under the general title "Liberalism and Cultural Membership," for a detailed treatment of the place of plural communities within a liberal social order. Kymlicka's concern is with the resources of individualist political theory to deal with questions of minority rights that relate to keeping distinct sub-communities intact within a larger liberal social order. Thus the question he poses is essentially an "outsider's": Why should we grant special status to minority communities within our boundaries? His treatment of communitarian arguments on this question (chapter 12) is dismissive.

<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to describe communitarian political theory in terms of a set of necessary and sufficient defining conditions, and thus to distinguish communitarian theorists from other philosophers who give communities a prominent place in their theories. See, for useful remarks on the subject, Carol C. Gould, *Rethinking Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture*, cited above, which incorporates material from his article "Liberalism and Communitarianism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1988): 181-204; Amy Gutmann, "Communitarian Critiques of Liberalism," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 14 (1985): 308-322; two essays in *Ethics* 99 (1989): William A. Galston, "Pluralism and Social Unity" (pp. 711-726), and Allen E. Buchanan, "Assessing the Communitarian Critique of Liberalism" (pp. 852-882); and Michael Walzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18 (1990): 6-23. Social theorists (e.g., Durkheim) who reject methodological individualism are communitarians in one sense; critics of political liberalism (e.g., Marx, the Frankfurt School, Habermas, Sandel, MacIntyre, socialist feminists) are united in decrying its emphasis on the individual, but differ radically about what to put in its place. Plato and Rousseau were communitarians on some accounts; Epicurus and Hobbes were not. To fix ideas for the sake of this argument, I will introduce below a descriptive template for characterizing social groups as communities and make some weak assumptions about what counts as a communitarian argument.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the same elements appear in a more detailed analysis of the



concept of a well-defined activity contained in Chapter 1 of my book *Reciprocity* (London and Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> With apologies to purists, I turn this word to my own purposes because I cannot think of a better one to capture the idea of responses that (though they may be radically different in all other respects) fall on the same side of indifference—i.e., have the same valence in that limited respect.

<sup>7</sup> Some readers have warned, here, and again in the reply to the first objection below (p. 20ff.), that this characterization may be false or misleading. Individualists tend to conceive diverse goods in the way my account is phrased, but communitarians may object to picturing them as a bundle of discrete interests or values to be assigned various weights in deliberation. Communitarians may be more likely to see each good named as a constitutive feature of the integral whole that is their community—much as we think of the things that are constitutive of a given person's identity. It is not clear to me whether pursuing this line will affect my argument.

<sup>8</sup> See Carol C. Gould, *Rethinking Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> There are, of course, tragic double-binds, in which either course of action will be self-destructive. But that does not undermine the ontological primacy of the community, nor warrant the conclusion that the interests of the "individuals" it generates can somehow come to have moral priority over it.

<sup>10</sup> In "Equality as Membership," *Rechtsphilosophie & Rechtstheorie*, 1990, n. 3, pp. 155-178.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> See the account of a case like this in Lincoln Caplan, "Open Adoption—Part I," *The New Yorker*, May 21, 1990, pp. 40-68.

<sup>13</sup> This canard is drawn from evidence that the word for human was, in some tribal languages, the same as the word for member of the tribe, and that fundamental taboos did not seem to apply across tribal boundaries. But of course it is a dangerous business to infer from such evidence that the members of the tribe actually held the beliefs at issue here.

<sup>14</sup> Certain absolutists may believe (e.g., about abortion) that determinate results can be deduced from only schematic descriptions of a case. And I have heard religious leaders make similarly definitive pronouncements about taking in the needy. So my point here may apply only to standard philosophical accounts of justice.